

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 13376 081611Z

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SUBJECT: FY 1975 IV NOMINEE MUSA AS SADR

REF: STATE 240355

1. HUSSEIN SADR, PRIVATE SECRETARY TO IMAM MOUSSA SADR, HAS INFORMED AMBASSADOR ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM IMAM THAT LATTER WILL NOT BE ABLE TRAVEL AS PLANNED IN NOVEMBER. HUSSEIN SAID IMAM REALIZES THAT SUCCESSIVE POSTPONEMENTS ARE VERY INCONVENIENT BUT HAS BEEN FORCED TO POSTPONE AGAIN IN SPITE OF HIS ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT.

2. HUSSEIN CITED TWO REASONS FOR IMAM'S DECISION NOT TO TRAVEL AT THIS TIME. FIRST, ACCORDING TO HUSSEIN, IS THAT "CERTAIN QUARTERS" HAVE BEGUN INDIRECT CAMPAIGN TO PAINT IMAM AND HIS SUPPORTERS AS "REVOLUTIONARIES" WHO SEEK TO "OVERTHROW PRESENT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT." IMAM WANTS TO REFUTE THIS CAMPAIGN BY ENGAGING IN PROTRACTED SERIES OF CONTACTS WITH LEADERS OF ALL RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUPS TO EMPHASIZE THAT HIS COMMITMENTS TO GOVERNMENTAL REFORM AND TO DEVELOPMENT OF DEPRIVED REGIONS ARE NOT INTENDED TO THREATEN LEBANON'S EXISTING SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT OR CONFESSIONAL BALANCE.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 13376 081611Z

3. SECOND REASON FOR IMAM'S DECISION, ACCORDING TO HUSSEIN, IS THAT AS PRESIDENT OF SUPREME ISLAMIC SHIITE COUNCIL IMAM HAS SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY UNDER SHIITE INTERNAL STATUTES TO PREPARE MAY 1975 ELECTIONS FOR NEW OFFICERS. THIS ENTAILS CALLING GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS COMMITTEES INTO SESSION SEVERAL MONTHS IN ADVANCE FOR "DISCUSSIONS." ELECTION IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IMAM'S OWN SIX-YEAR TERM IS UP FOR RENEWAL.

4. HUSSEIN INDICATED IMAM WISHES TO POSTPONE TRIP TO LATE MARCH, BY WHICH TIME HE WOULD HAVE NEUTRALIZED OPPOSITION, PREPARED ELECTIONS, AND BE READY TO WITHDRAW AND AWAIT RESULTS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT IMAM LOOKS FORWARD EAGERLY TO HIS "VITALLY IMPORTANT" VISIT TO THE U.S. BUT IS UNFORTUNATELY CAUGHT AGAIN IN TEMPORARY POLITICAL MANEUVERS.

5. AMBASSADOR ASKED HUSSEIN IF HE THOUGHT LATE MARCH DEPARTURE WAS REALISTIC POSSIBILITY. HUSSEIN REPLIED THAT IMAM THOUGHT SO, BUT THAT HE PERSONALLY HAD DOUBTS. AMBASSADOR AGREED TO PLAN ON LATE MARCH DEPARTURE, BUT OBSERVED THAT NATURE OF LEBANESE POLITICS MADE IT MORE LIKELY IMAM WOULD END UP AWAITING COMPLETION OF ELECTION PROCESS BEFORE TRAVELLING.

6. IN CLOSING, HUSSEIN CONVEYED IMAM'S DESIRE TO MEET WITH AMBASSADOR PRIVATELY AND AT LENGTH, AND LUNCHEON APPOINTMENT FIXED FOR NOVEMBER 11 AT RESIDENCE.

7. COMMENT: IT IS CERTAIN THAT CHAMBER SPEAKER KAMEL AL-ASSAD WILL MAKE MAJOR ATTEMPT TO UNSEAT IMAM IN COMING SHIITE COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND THAT SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST IMAM IS OPENING GUN OF AL-ASSAD'S CAMPAIGN. DEPARTMENT WILL RECOGNIZE DESIRABILITY OF KEEPING INVITATION OPEN WHILE OMAM LINES UP HIS DUCKS. AS INSURANCE, HOWEVER, MISSION SUBMITTING NOMINATIONS OF TWO ALTERNATES FOR GRANT IN EVENT IMAM CANNOT TRAVEL AT ALL.
GODLEY

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